

CITY OF NEWARK, NJ'S AFRICAN-AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Remy Peace - March 12, 1997

Q: Good morning. This is Glen Marie Brickus at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Emory Pearce. I am here with Mrs. Remy Pearce. Today is March 12, 1997. Mrs. Pearce, I just want to say good morning.

Pearce: Good morning to you.

Q: And thank you for letting me come and for agreeing to become a part of the African-American Cultural Center at the Scott-Krueger Mansion in Newark. Now with this, I will ask you if you would please give me your full name, your date of birth, and where you were born?

Pearce: My name is Remy, R E M A Y, Hicks Pearce, P E A R C E. Date of birth is February 6th, 1920.

Q: And your place of birth?

Pearce: Pelham, Georgia.

Q: Mrs. Pearce, what kind of work do you do now, or have you done?

Pearce: I am retired presently. I did work for the City of Newark and also for the Health Department in the City of Newark.

Q: How far did you go in school?

Pearce: I went. I graduated from Waverly Avenue School. I went two terms at the Wickwake High.

Q: Who did you marry, when and where?

Pearce: I married Mr. Emory Pearce in the City of Newark, May 22, 1934.

Q: How did you meet Mr. Pearce and how long did you know him before you and he were married?

Pearce: Oh now that I couldn't tell you. [Laughter] All I know is that we met because we were going at different meetings in the community.

Q: I see. What kind of work did Mr. Pearce do?

Pearce: I better let him tell you that because I think I really didn't remember. In later years, he went to the Congoleum and he became one of the foemen there.

Q: I see. Did you and he have any children?

Pearce: Yes. We had two children. Ronald [?] Pearce and Beverly Ann Pearce.

Q: They take it are adult now?

Pearce: Yes.

Q: And what do they do?

Pearce: My daughter presently is working downtown at the five and ten, I believe it's one of them, McCrory's or something. I think she's still there. I'm telling you I don't really know. That's where she was working. Now whether she's still there or not. Because she was born in 1940, and therefore, August 8, 1940, so you know how old she is.

Q: Mrs. Pearce what was your father's name and where was he born?

Pearce: My father's name was John Hicks. And he was born in Pelham, Georgia.

Q: And your mother's maiden name and where was she born?

Pearce: As far as I know, Georgia too. My mother's maiden name was Files.

Q: Did you have any brothers and sisters.

Pearce: Yes. I had. My brother's name was John Hicks, John J. Hicks. My sister's name, Maggie Hicks Hargrave, Rose Hicks Atkinson, Louise Hicks Beeks, Helen Hicks Beeks, Remy Hicks Pearce. And I have three half sisters. Lucille Hicks, Dorothy P. Hicks, and Elaine Hicks.

Q: What was your father's occupation?

Pearce: He was a mason.

Q: And your mother?

Pearce: I did not know my mother's job because my mother died when I was at age two.

Q: Remy, have you ever changed your name for any reason, for instance, like becoming a member in some social or ethnic group or for political reasons?

Pearce: Never.

Q: When did you first come to Newark?

Pearce: I came to Newark at the age of two, whatever year that was.

Q: How did you come to Newark?

Pearce: By train.

Q: And who brought you to Newark?

Pearce: My, I think it was my stepmother's sister. If I can remember correctly. Because, oh boy. I really can't think of that right now.

Q: Did you know anyone, did your family know anybody in Newark before they came here to live?

Pearce: No. And the reason that we came to Newark was because my father and his brother were contract workers, building maintenance. And they came here because they were building Newark up. The schools and etc. And after they got settled, then they sent for us.

Q: I see. So at the age of two you would not remember much about the condition of the train that you came on as far as.

Pearce: No.

Q: Whether they were segregated, and whether it was clean or crowded or what.

Pearce: But as far as I can remember, the segregation didn't take place until after the Civil Rights Bill was passed.

Q: Okay. We're gonna get to that a little later.

Pearce: Okay.

Q: Do you remember what happened when you arrived in Newark, who met you?

Pearce: No.

Q: How many times have you returned to, did you say Georgia where you were born?

Pearce: Yes.

Q: How many times have you returned to Georgia since you came to Newark?

Pearce: Well I went to Georgia, just to go down to visit where I came from, I can't remember that. I might have gone one time, but it was because I was in Georgia at a meeting. And then I toured, you know, I went to one of the places.

Q: Where did you first live when you came to Newark?

Pearce: We lived at 327 Flemings Avenue. As far as I can remember in Newark.

Q: How long did you stay there?

Pearce: That I don't remember. Because I was too young. See, I came to Newark at the age of two. I can't remember all those things.

Q: Right. I understand.

Pearce: But I know at the age of six, I was living on Eighteenth Avenue, 337 if I'm not mistaken.

Q: What was your, when you grew older, what your impression of Newark? At the age that you began to notice your environment.

Pearce: When I came to Newark, there was no segregation as far as I can remember. We, whites lived in the same house. They lived next door to each other. We ate at each other's tables, we slept in each other's beds. There was no segregation back in those days.

Q: Remy, what was the housing like, the first that you can remember, what was the housing like? Was it a rooming house or boarding house or one family house or?

Pearce: No. We were in a three family house. There was a shoemaker on the first floor. We were on the second floor. And there was an Italian family on the third floor. We had eight girls and one boy, and I think they had just the opposite.

Q: How did you, do you remember how that, how your family acquired that housing? Why did they move into that particular place? Did somebody help them get the apartment or?

Pearce: Well, my father and his brothers, three of them, were brick makers. And they started to build up Newark, and they wanted people that knew how to lay bricks. You know. So they came this way, and they got jobs, you know, doing brick making work and etc. And then after they got a place for us, then that's when they sent for us.

Q: I see. Do you remember what the neighborhood was like?

Pearce: The neighborhoods, there was no segregation in the neighborhoods that I lived on in Newark. Blacks and whites lived in the same house. They lived next door to each other. I never lived in an all black neighborhood until I got married.

Q: Were there businesses and factories in that neighborhood where you lived?

Pearce: Not really. It was a residential neighborhood, but there was, like people had, there was a shoemaker that lived in one of the places that we lived. He had a shoemaker shop down there where he repaired shoes. And we lived on the second floor, and an Italian family lived on the third floor.

Q: Where did you live next in Newark and why did you settle there?

Pearce: Well, my father and his, as I said, and his brothers were brickmakers. And they came here to get a job. Because they were construction people, you know, labor and etc. And after they found a place for us, which was once they accumulated some money, etc., then that's when they sent for us. And I was, at that time when I came to Newark, as I say I was six years old.

Q: Right. Now, what I'm trying to understand is after you left the first neighborhood where you lived, do you remember where you lived next?

Pearce: The next I think was 337 Eighteenth Avenue. And, of course, we were in Flemings Avenue, which was down next in the first place. And then we moved to Eighteenth Avenue.

Q: I see. Do you remember how long you stayed at Eighteenth Avenue?

Pearce: No I don't remember now. But I know that's where I started, I was living there when I started to school.

Q: Where did the family do their shopping, Remy, and on what basis did they shop in those stores?

Pearce: There as far as I can remember, there was no segregation. If you had money, you could buy anything you want, and go anyplace you wanted to that money could buy. That's the way I remember.

Q: So you did not, you didn't shop at those places because, for instance, the owner of the business might have been African-American? You shopped there because you needed, they had what you needed.

Pearce: They had what I needed.

Q: How were you treated as a customer?

Pearce: I, at that time when I was young, there was no animosity because of the color of your skin. That's what I remember.

Q: What was the ethnicity or the race of the people, the merchants in the neighborhood? Were there any blacks who owned businesses there?

Pearce: No. I don't remember any black owned businesses. But, as I said, there was a shoemaker in the building that we lived. He had the first floor and we lived above him.

Q: Did the business people employ black folk?

Pearce: That I can't remember.

Q: When you were old enough to remember, do you remember any businesses in your neighborhood where black folks worked or where they were hired?

Pearce: Oh they hired them, yes, to do the labor work. In other words, bring in the --

Q: In the foods.

Pearce: Yes. Right.



Q: Did local stores offer the residents credit? Could you get credit at the stores at that time?

Pearce: I don't remember that.

Q: What I want you to do now is to tell me back as far as you can remember, not, you know, I don't remember back when you were two years old. But at the time you were old enough to pay attention and to remember, can you remember whether the stores in the neighborhood gave the people credit.

Pearce: That I can't remember, but we were able to shop there. You understand. There was no, you couldn't, because of the color of your skin. You couldn't go in there and get this, that and the other. But that part I don't remember. But there was no, there was no segregation as far as I was concerned when I was small. Not until after the Civil Rights Bill was passed.

Q: When did you first become aware of what we refer to as soul food?

Pearce: [Laughter] Well, the only thing that I can remember is that our menu consisted of greens and cabbage. Leafy vegetables. String beans and at that time we ate a lot of pork. And sweet potatoes. Those were our. White potatoes, sweet potatoes, pork, string beans and greens.

Q: Okay. So that was the same kinds of food that people in the south ate.

Pearce: Right.

Q: And they still ate, African-Americans ate that same food when they came here. To Newark or anywhere else.

Pearce: Right.

Q: Can you remember, could you make a comparison between the kind of clothing that people

wore in the south and what they were wearing here in New York?

Pearce: No, I don't think I can make that comparison, but, I mean, I know that they wore, we got to wear heavier clothes here. Because in the south it was warm. And in the north we had to, you know, wear heavier clothes, coats and hats.

Q: Do you remember whether or not your family became a part of what we refer to as an extended family? Meaning people who were not related, but who were cooperative, who helped each other when they needed help, and people who were concerned about other people's children, their behavior and the quality of their education and what not. Did you find that to be?

Pearce: Well, we were instrumental, our family was, in a number of our relatives coming to Newark. Because they, and most everybody that came, our family came north, they would stay with us until they got on their feet. And that reason was my father and his brothers, as I said, were brick masons, and they were responsible for a lot of the buildings that are standing today. Because they did the brick work on them. And so when they came north, most of them came to stay at our house until they could get a place of their own.

Q: Did you call people here in Newark, did you remember calling people aunt and cousin even if they were not really a relative?

Pearce: Yes. I think I can remember that.

Q: When I lived in the south, everybody who was an older person, an adult, always had that kind of respect. We had to give it. We called older ladies aunt and men uncle.

Pearce: And cousin.

Q: Right. Even though they were no relation whatsoever. Were events such as births, weddings,

and funerals observed differently here in Newark than they were in your home?

Pearce: Oh, I can't remember anything about no funerals in Georgia cause I was too young.

Q: Do you notice any change, like I said before, we have to start at the point where you can remember. Can you remember any changes in those kinds of observances since you have been in Newark?

Pearce: Yes. The first change that I recognized was the fact that we were able to live in the neighborhoods and move into a house that you could afford to pay the rent and not because of the color of your skin. I never lived in all black neighborhood when I was a child growing up. As I said, we lived next door to each other, we ate at each other's table, we slept in each other's beds, and there was none of this animosity because of the color of your skin.

Q: Remay, what kind of changes can you recognize in the way that holidays like Christmas and Easter and Fourth of July and Thanksgiving were celebrated at your earliest experiences here in Newark and now?

Pearce: Well, years ago we used to all get together. Everybody would cook something and bring it, you know, to the house. And we would all just sit down and enjoy it. One person didn't have to do everything and do the whole meal and what not. And that's how we did it in the family. Everybody chipped in. They used to get together and decide what we were going to have as a menu, and then everybody, the things that they could the best, that's what they brought.

Q: What about the use of items like liquor, drugs, tobacco, and such? Can you remember when you were younger, do you remember how prevalent the use of those things were as compared to now?

Pearce: Well, they weren't prevalent at all back in those days in my family. The only thing that

was in my family, that my father used to like to drink his little toddy. He didn't drink hard liquor, but he would put some water or some ginger ale into his whiskey. You understand? And that's how he would drink it. And he was the only one. My brother never drank. My older sisters never drank. My sister Rose, she today still don't drink. My sister Louise used to drink a little, and my sister Helen. They are the only two in the family, out of the eight girls and one boy, that used to drink.

Q: As you grew up, Remay, did your family members or people in the neighborhood use home remedies or patent medicines and midwives here in Newark?

Pearce: Well, we used a lot of home remedies. And I can remember that when I was, there was this midwife did come into the house. Cause I can remember I was afraid of her.

Q: Do you remember any of the home remedies and what they were used for? Like when you had a cold or when you needed a laxative or those kinds of things, what did the grownups give you?

Pearce: Oh Lord. One was Epsom salt. That was a popular thing. And.

Q: What about castor oil?

Pearce: And castor oil. Right. Castor oil and Epsom salt. Those were the two.

Q: Did you ever know anybody who believed in the practice of what they refer to as fixing somebody? Like with conjure or voodoo or whodo and roots, and all that kind of stuff. Did you ever know anybody who?

Pearce: No, I never knew anybody. But I heard about those things. I heard about those things. But I didn't really know anybody.

Q: Did you have pets as you grew up, Remy?

Pearce: No. Not really. Because there were so many of us, we didn't have no place to put a pet.

[Laughter] Eight girls and one boy.

Q: So what about pets since you've been on your own, since you've been your own housekeeper? Did you ever have any pets?

Pearce: Well, yes because my son, where he got it from I don't know, but he was crazy about pet dogs. And so we had a dog or pet for him ever since he was about, I guess, six years old. That's when we started to have the animals.

Q: What about the incidents of crime when you were younger, Remy? How did it compare then with now?

Pearce: The crime rate was very, very low because everybody trusted everybody. We could go out and go to the store and leave our doors open. You understand? Unlocked is what I mean. And nobody would go in the house. And your neighbors would always look out for you. You know. And so it was, the crime rate was really zero, back in those days.

Q: What about juveniles? Did you ever hear of any young people getting into trouble then as they do now?

Pearce: No. No. Cause see parents at that time was more concerned about their children. And they didn't go shove them off on somebody else. And then you have to have do's and don't's for children. And that's the way I brought mine up. Certain things you can do, other things you can't do. And if you do it, you're gonna get punished or you're gonna get a good beating. One of the two.

Q: What about the prevalence of welfare and single family homes?

Pearce: Well, welfare was a way of life then for anyone that was unemployed. And just like my father was a brick mason. His brother's a brick mason, which is responsible for a lot of the buildings standing today. When they were out of work because of the snow and the rain, they couldn't lay no bricks in the snow and the rain, then they had to go to welfare.

Q: I see.

Pearce: So that's how they, we survived, by them going to welfare. Because they had no unemployment insurance.

Q: What about single family homes with mothers raising the children and the fathers were nowhere to be found?

Pearce: I didn't see any.

Q: Now you talked about race relations. How would you classify the overall relations with whites in Newark as you grew up?

Pearce: As I grew up, I tell you the truth we didn't really have any conflicting stories or worries. We didn't worry about if you were black, if you were white, you were green or you're blue. We all lived together. We ate at each other's house. You understand? We sat at each other's. And all of this, you know, when all the other stuff turned around it was just devastating to me, if you want to know the truth. But it was because, simply because we gained our rights. But before 65 there was no problem in Newark, wherever I lived, with any whites.

Q: Can you tell me more about what began to happen with race relations after 1965?

Pearce: Oh yeah. They moved out. They didn't want to live in the same house with us. They didn't want to live next door to us. And most of them made an exit to East Orange, Montclair, to the suburbs. The ones that did remain was the ones that lived below in the East Ward.

Q: Do you know of any part of Newark where black people from the same place in the south lived together? For instance, like from your hometown, or a lot of people, you know, from Florida or Louisiana, do you know of anybody who came to Newark from the south, and they all lived in the same neighborhood? They seemed to migrate to the same area.

Pearce: Well, my father and his brother first came here, they came before we came. And after they found a place for us, then they sent for us. We came. And then after we came, then my other father's brother and his children, they wanted to come. You understand? So they migrated here. And so when we ended up, all of us were here.

Q: Remy, can you remember what your first job in Newark was? What was the first job that you?

Pearce: It couldn't have been anything but babysitting and doing some of the chores. You understand. For some of the whites. You know what I mean. And that's as far as I.

END SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE; BEGIN SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

Q: Mrs. Pearce, I was asking you about your first job in Newark. And I think you had told me that it was probably like babysitting or doing domestic work. Can you remember how long you did that kind of work?

Pearce: No. It wasn't very long. Because I got married at an early age. And that was why I said no, it wasn't long. But it was babysitting. I used to babysit, you know, quite a bit. And oh, when the Jewish people had their holidays, that was when. And they couldn't do this and they couldn't

that, and they couldn't do the other thing, so then I would go in and do what they couldn't do.

Q: Oh. I see. What kind of pay did you get for doing that kind of work?

Pearce: Peanuts. [Laughter] But it was enough to survive on.

Q: What were the working conditions like? How did they treat you when you went on those kinds of jobs?

Pearce: I tell you the truth. Comparing the whites of yesterday and the whites of today, it's like day and night. Years ago, the whites had no barrier. You could sleep in their beds, you could eat at their tables. You understand? And they were friends with you. When I say, I mean, acquaintances. And it went on like that here in the City of Newark until 1965, when the Civil Rights Bill was passed. And once they passed that Civil Rights Bill, the friends that we had ate at each other's tables, slept at each other's house, they just started to ignore us as if they didn't know us at all. That was the beginning of the turmoil in Newark.

Q: I see. Remy, now after that period when you did the domestic work, do you remember what your first real job was in Newark?

Pearce: I think it was. Oh, the Health Department I think it was. It was either the City of Newark or the Health Department.

Q: I see. Were you ever unemployed? If so, for how long.

Pearce: Not really. Because once I started to work, I worked until I decided to retire.

Q: As far back as you can remember, what were the common types of work that black men and women did in Newark?



Pearce: Well, women did domestic work. And the men, they were doing the construction. Because, you see, whites could not take the heights that blacks could go up. You know. So when it came to building, you know, the majority of the construction was with the whites, with the blacks rather. Because my father and his two brothers, that's how they, they came to Newark because of the construction work that was going on. And after they were here for a year or so, then they sent for us.

Q: Do you remember when blacks began to go into different occupations? We know that there was a period, I can remember when every Sunday you'd pick up the Newark Evening News or the Newark Star Ledger, there were pages of ads for domestic workers. And as time has gone on, you don't see any of those ads anymore. So do you remember when black people started to do other kinds of work?

Pearce: Yeah. After the Civil Rights Bill. Because before 1965, we had no rights.

Q: What kind of jobs did they go into after that time?

Pearce: Well, anything that you were qualified to do. Because just like, as I said, my father and them did a lot of construction work, building, putting the bricks on. He and his other two brothers did that. And as I said, a lot of the buildings standing today, they laid the bricks on.

Q: I see. Mrs. Pearce, what church did you belong to?

Pearce: Metropolitan.

Q: How long have you been a member there?

Pearce: It's been a long time. I can't, I think I have it written down somewhere.

Q: Well, that must be a long time if you can't remember. [Laughter] How active have you been in the church? What are some of the things that you've done?

Pearce: Well, I used to be very active. I was the president of the Usher Board for a while. I was the president of one of the auxiliary and missionary societies. I served as vice president of the missionary society. And I helped to organize the church in order for us to build a new church. And I suggested that we each contribute seven dollars a week to the building fund. And that way we would have our money in advance. You understand? And not have to go to work and build the building and then we had all this huge amount of money to pay in the end. So, that's what we did. We contributed x number of dollars to the building fund, and when we got ready to build our church, we had x number of thousands of dollars.

Q: What do you think have been some of the churches greater achievements?

Pearce: Well, Metropolitan used to do a lot of things to help people. We used to have clothes brought into the church for the poor. And we used to have food in hand brought in. Anybody that was hungry they could come, you know, and get food. So we used to do a lot of things. But by me not being as active, you know, as I was, that, you know, I don't know what goes really on now.

Q: I see.

Pearce: But when I was very active, we used to do a lot of things to help people.

Q: Who do you think or who can you remember that you might consider having been an outstanding minister?

Pearce: Well, I don't think anybody could be more outstanding than Pierre.

Q: Was Reverend Johnson the pastor there when you went there?

Pearce: No. I don't think so. I think Reverend came in. I think Waters was there if I'm not mistaken.

Q: I see. And so Reverend Johnson was pastor there over, what about thirty-five, forty years?

Pearce: It's been a long time.

Q: And he passed away. Okay. Do you have any kind of materials like pictures and citations or plaques that you might have been given for some of the things that you did in the church?

Pearce: I did have some. But I don't know where they are now. But, in fact, somebody was here, and I showed them some of those things. But now where they are now, Marie, I'll have to look for them and see whether or not. Because you see somebody broke into our house, and they took some things. You understand. And some of the things that they took were of value to me, but to nobody else. So that's. But I'll have to look. But like I said, there are some things in our safe. And that's why we. Cause, you know, my son was in business. And so when he went out of business, he took the safe. And that's how we preserve our things cause if they have to go in there, they're gonna have to break in the safe. And if they take it out, it's gonna be a big struggle for them to take it out.

Q: I see. How much have you participated in social and cultural activities in Newark? Such as the Eastern Star or bridge clubs, literary societies, or choral ensembles. Did you ever sing with any groups?

Pearce: No. I never sang. But I used to attend, you know, a lot of the things. The meetings and the functions of, you know, the organizations.

Q: What about the Eastern Star? Were you ever a member of the Eastern Star?

Pearce: I can't remember being a member of it. I know I used to attend their affairs because I knew people that were members, you know.

Q: How much have you participated in political activities? And what political organizations do you belong to?

Pearce: I became interested in politics. I'm trying to think. I think it had something to do with, you know, they kept going up on the taxes on the property. And I used to go to try to find out, to the meetings to find out why do they continue, every year they want to go up, you know, on your property taxes. And this is when I found out that they used that money to increase their salaries. And what not. And so I started a ruckus on that. You know what I mean. I said, now here we are. I said, when I was working I didn't mind giving, paying the increase. I said, but now we're home owners and we're taxpayers. But we're getting, I said, I'm getting a month what I used to get a week. Now how can I continue to increase your salaries at the expense of the homeowners? I thought it was illegal and unfair to us.

Q: And they're still doing it.

Pearce: I know. They're still doing it. And, but see, I raised a lot of sand with them.

Q: What political party do you belong to?

Pearce: The Democrats.

Q: Are you still active in politics?

Pearce: Well, I still attend some of the meetings, yeah, but I'm not as active as I was.

Q: What do you know? I meant to ask you what you knew about the history of Metropolitan. Let's go back to that for a minute. Do you know anything about the history of Metropolitan Baptist Church?

Pearce: Well, the history of Metropolitan Baptist Church when we were at --

Q: At Prince Street.

Pearce: We were on, oh yeah that's it, Prince Street. But before then, yeah, because that's where I joined when we were on Prince Street. And I used to, I served as president of the usher board. I served on finance committee. And the, as I said, the building fund committee. That's where we started our building fund committee to buy us a new church, to build a new church.

Q: Do you remember where the church was located before they moved to Prince Street?

Pearce: It was, it was, it wasn't Metropolitan Baptist Church. It was another name. I believe it was Friendship. Was it Friendship? Oh, I don't know. I better check that out. Because, I don't know. I better check that out.

Q: So when the church moved from Prince Street to the new location, where did they relocate?

Pearce: Springfield Avenue.

Q: Okay. And how long did it take to build that church? Do you remember?

Pearce: Not that long. No, because we were, they had wanted [voice too low], and I had suggested to them. I said, we ought to start contributing to the building fund. Everybody pay seven dollars a week. I said. I said, and we put that in a special fund. And then when we get ready to purchase our new church, we'll have x number of dollars. And we had a nice sum of

money.

Q: How large is the membership of Metropolitan?

Pearce: Well, right now, Marie, I couldn't tell you. Cause I really don't go to church that much now.

Q: What was it at the maximum when you did attend regularly?

Pearce: Oh we had, I think we must have had about, oh it was way up there in the hundreds. We had a large number. Because that church, when we were at 32 Prince Street, that church would be running over. And people would have to, you know, go up in the balcony. You know, and then, that's why we, cause there were so many people, older people, you understand, and they didn't want to climb them steps, you know. We didn't have no elevator to go upstairs to sit in that balcony. So then that was one of the reasons we decided that we needed to build a new church.

Q: Now, we had started to talk about politics, Remy. What kind of changes have you noticed in the political structure in Newark since you did become active?

Pearce: I really don't. I couldn't really answer that. But I know that they don't seem to be as interested, you know what I mean, as they should be. You know. Well, I think we, you know, because I think we used to go around. I know I did in my district. I used to go down and find out if anybody had any problems. You understand? That they would like me to help them to intercede. And but I don't find that going on too much today, you know. People don't take that time anymore. But I'm not interested in the political aspects of it now.

Q: Did it make any difference for blacks in Newark when Mr. Gibson was elected as mayor in 1970?

Pearce: Well, I think it did. Because there was, people got jobs that they couldn't get before. You understand? And, so I think he made a good change, you know, for the people in the City of Newark.

Q: How much have you participated in community activities such as neighborhood groups, civic organizations and such?

Pearce: Well, I used to be very active as I said, Marie. And at most any meeting that was held in the community, you know, any block club meeting or civic meeting, I would attend. But after I got ill and then my vision got poor, that's when I stopped, you know, attending because I couldn't drive. You know. And I certainly couldn't be out there at night.

Q: Right. Do you remember what roles you might have played? What precisely was your participation in those groups and what were some of the things that the groups addressed themselves to?

Pearce: Well, one of the things that we were interested in was the crime. And the drugs. Because they were bringing in the drugs and giving it to our young people. And that's when we started to address those things. And I tried to explain to them when we used to have these meetings that because the Civil Rights Bill was passed, nobody paid that any attention to a degree. I said, but then, the jobs were at stake. Whites could no longer get a job because they were white. And you blacks you couldn't get a job. So what they did, they said, well, we'll fix them. And here they come in and brought these drugs. Gave them to the kids to get them hooked. And then they started the children selling.

Q: Did you notice any differences in the black community once young people did start to use drugs?

Pearce: Oh yeah. Definitely. There was a, the relationships between the community was no

longer there. Because after all, if your son was selling drugs and you're interested in the money, you're not going to squeal on him. You see. And so I think that's where the breakdown came in. Because if you've got a child out there doing something they shouldn't be doing, and you're certainly not going to tell me.

Q: Right.

Pearce: You understand? So I think that's where the breakdown came in the community. When they brought them drugs in.

Q: Right. Right. Do you have any pictures of any kind of materials from those, from that kind of participation in the community? That's one of the things that we've always good at making group pictures.

Pearce: I might have some pictures around here. I'll have to look because a lot of that stuff, you know what I mean, is put away. And it's been, I have some books. You know.

Q: Remy, besides from being a consumer of regular goods and services, in what ways did you participate in the economic life of the community?

Pearce: Well, I don't know about that. The only thing that I tried to tell people in the community. You're in this area. We own our own homes. And try your best to keep it up. I said, because if you let your property go down or look bad, nobody else is going to want to come in. And so that was my one thing in the community. I used to go around to the houses. And if they needed painting or anything, I would try to entice them to keep their homes up. I said, because if you keep up your home up, the property value stays up. But if everything around, I don't care how nice your home is, if everybody else's is looking bad, you know, that lowers the value of the property. And that's what I tried to impress upon the neighborhood.



Q: Did you ever own your own business?

Pearce: No. Not really.

Q: Did you ever purchase or buy any stock in any black businesses? Like banks.

Pearce: I think I did. I think when, what's his name was down there.

Q: Charlie Wiggams. The City National Bank.

Pearce: City National, yeah. I think I. But, you know, I can't remember. But I think I did.

Q: When you first became aware of social life and economic life in Newark, and political activities, how did you get information on the news and events of the community? For instance, like, did you read a black newspaper? Did you listen to black oriented radio?

Pearce: Not really because, as I said, until, and the Civil Rights Bill was not passed until 65. And until we passed that Civil Rights Bill, we didn't have any of these problems. The way I saw it. We went to meetings, we went to each other's homes, you understand, we ate at each other's tables. And it was only after 1965 was when that Civil Rights Bill was passed was when all this trouble began between the barriers of color.

Q: Did you ever read the Afro-American or the Pittsburgh Courier? Did you ever buy those papers.

Pearce: Oh yeah. I used to have them delivered.

Q: What about listening to WNJR and WLIB?

Pearce: Yeah, I used to listen to those too. But now I don't listen to anything hardly. You see nothing is on.

Q: Right. Did you ever meet any outstanding blacks in Newark? Either meet them or hear of them coming to Newark? Like entertainers or black ministers of politicians? You ever remember any of those?

Pearce: Well, yeah, we used to have black ministers come, you know, periodically. We had entertainers.

Q: Do you remember who any of them were?

Pearce: You know, like I told somebody else when you were talking about the different things that happened in Newark. I said, yes. I said but do you know before 1965, I said, black people and white people had no problem with each other. I said, we ate at each other's house and slept in each other's beds, and. And I said, but after the Civil Rights Bill was passed, then they turned against us just like white on rice. And I said that's the part that really got me. I never could understand. And so they said, Remy, what are you talking about? I said, well, you know, I never lived in an all black neighborhood, in a house where there was all blacks until I got married. I said, there was no difference between us. But I could never understand why when we got our rights that they decided that, you know, well this was not, well we want to get out of town. And that part always disturbed me.

Q: Do you remember when blacks were first hired in the police department or as fire fighters or social workers?

Pearce: I can't remember the date or anything, but I remember when we got our first police director. I think his name was Eddie Williams. If I'm not mistaken.

Q: Eddie Lee Kerr was the first black police chief in Newark. Ken Gibson hired him.

Pearce: Well, see, I don't remember that name. I remember Eddie Williams who was. Emory might tell you the answer to that. Because he was over there on Seventeenth Avenue Precinct.

Q: You're talking about Hubert Williams. Hubert Williams was the second black police director. He came after Eddie Kerr.

Pearce: Yeah, that's what I'm talking about. Who.

Q: Hubert.

Pearce: Hubert. But, no, before then, see, one of our friends was in there. See. And if I'm not mistaken, I think he was Eddie Williams. That's why I say I wish Emory was here. So that he could tell you.

Q: Well, that's all right. He'll tell me on his interview. What about firefighters? Do you remember when the first blacks were hired as firefighters?

Pearce: No. No.

Q: What about social workers? And when I say social workers, I mean those persons who served the people who were on public assistance at the time?

Pearce: Well, I remember when they started going around. But I couldn't remember the time or anything like that. I know it was after the Civil Rights Bill was passed. That I know.

Q: When people in the black community got in trouble or needed help to solve a problem, where did they go? To whom did they go?

Pearce: Most times it was to the community. And the people in the community. And then, you know, if somebody had an idea or suggestion, you understand, who they needed to go or if they needed an attorney, you understand, whatever the case might be, they would get advice.

Q: Were these people effective in helping people solve problems?

Pearce: I think so.

Q: Now, you talked about before the Civil Rights Bill in 1965. How do you think black people in Newark were perceived after 1965, and are still perceived in Newark?

Pearce: As, I don't want to say ignorant because I know that we're not. But they really let us down, the whites did. As I said, because before we had no problems with them. Living next door to them, upstairs or downstairs, beneath them. But after the Civil Rights Bill was passed, that's when they made their exit. They didn't want to have anything to do with us. And that is a part of history that I never could understand as why. As long as we had, the Civil Rights Bill wasn't passed, we had no problem with white people.

Q: When the whites began to move out, blacks began to move into those neighborhoods where whites had lived. What happened to the properties in those neighborhoods after the whites moved out?

Pearce: Well, the property held up for a while. But then, when they started to move people from the projects into the neighborhoods, that's when our neighborhoods started to deteriorate.

Q: So were the areas where black folks began to congregate, were they considered as being slums or ghettos, or did they become slums after blacks started?

Pearce: I think they became slums because, like I said, I never saw an area.

END SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE; BEGIN SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

Q: My question to you, Remy, was, in what major ways has Newark has changed since you first arrived here and how do you view the changes that have taken place?

Pearce: Well, there has been several changes. Because when I first came here, there were neighborhoods where everybody lived together. Houses where everybody lived together. Blacks on one floor, whites on the other. But the major change came after the Civil Rights Bill passed. And this was the part that none of us that had been here for a long time could understand. Because we all ate at each other's table, slept in each other's beds, and was friends to each other. And then after the Civil Rights Bill was passed, then we were perceived as animals or whatever. Nobody wanted to have anything to do with us. So this is the part that really disturbs me. Because we were all friends, and black, white, green, blue, Chinese, whatever, but nobody had any animosity against each other just because he was a different color. And that's the part, as I said, that got me. And I still cannot understand it today. What does the color of your skin mean if you have character?

Q: How do you view the changes that have occurred since you came on. And I think you just indicated that to me. Can you remember any traditions or any celebrations that at one time that happened or occurred in the black community that no longer exist?

Pearce: No. I really can't. Cause I really don't think we did any celebrating.

Q: What about parades and?

Pearce: No. We have no black parades and nothing like that. All this came about after the Civil Rights Bill. See, that's what most people don't understand. We had no rights until 1965 after that. you could not do what you wanted to do, go where you wanted to go, or have anything in your house.

Q: Well, those things that did that after 1965 I remember when we used to have the Christmas Attics Parade. And there was another annual parade that my folks used to go out to.

Pearce: Yes. I remember that.

Q: Do they still exist anymore?

Pearce: I don't know. Because see after my eyes went bad, that's when I threw in the towel.

Q: When do you feel black life in Newark reached it's highest peak and what was so great about that time?

Pearce: Well, the greatest point that I recognized is the fact that when we were able to walk the streets without being called nigger or coon or something, some derogatory, and get run from one side of the town to the other. It was something terrible. That's the part that I see that made a difference. At least we're able, even though we might not agree with the person or we don't refer to them as, you know, different names, call them derogatory names.

Q: That would have been then the lowest point in black life in Newark. What do you consider might have been the highest or the best time in Newark for black folk?

Pearce: Just after the Civil Rights Bill was passed, and we were able to have some things of our own without them taking them away from us. And as I repeat, you couldn't have anything in your house or anywhere else. If they wanted it, they couldn't take it.

Q: Mrs. Pearce, what do you, did you know Louise Scott personally? Did you ever meet her?

Pearce: I had met her. Yes.

Q: You met her?

Pearce: Yes.

Q: What do you think the community's perception of her was?

Pearce: Well, as far as I know, everybody recognized her for her achievements. And because we attribute a lot of it, you know, to her.

Q: Did you ever visit her home on High Street?

Pearce: Yes. I was there.

Q: On what occasion did you go there?

Pearce: When they would hold meetings, you know, certain meetings.

Q: What do you know about the area where the mansion is located?

Pearce: Right now? I hardly remember. But we used to go there and take people by, you know, to see it and all of that, you know. But, you know, but for the last some odd years I haven't been doing anything hardly.

Q: I have two final questions that I'm going to ask you Mrs. Pearce and you could answer them in your own way. How would you sum up your experience of living in Newark? And if you had your life to live over again would you live in Newark?

Pearce: Yes. I would live in Newark. And I have enjoyed living in Newark. As I said, because we had no, there was no discrimination back in Newark when I was a youngster. The

discrimination came about after 1965 when we received our rights, you see. Up until then, we had no problems with anybody.

Q: Okay. Now, is there anything that I did not cover that you would like to tell me about yourself and your experiences in Newark?

Pearce: The only thing, let me say, I have enjoyed living in Newark. As I said, we've had some problems, you know, and all that was when I was younger. I was able to take it then. I'm old now. So but as far as the living conditions, you know, I say people live the way they want to live. And my father lived in Newark. We came here, as I said, at a very early age and built a lot of the buildings that are still standing. And then he sent for us. And when we came, we lived according to the times. And at the time, blacks and whites had no arguments with each other. They didn't, because you were black you couldn't live here and because you were white, you know. And when all the other stuff came by, after the Civil Rights Bill, that's when all of us started to go our separate ways. But I have nothing to say about the City of Newark, you understand, other than I lived here, I worked here, you understand, and I have enjoyed the surroundings that are here. So I really, you know, because if we had not wanted to stay, we could have gone. You understand? We could have left Newark. But we chose to stay here because we had, we were living around people of our own color. And so I have no qualms about it. At one time, you know, I wanted to get out like everybody else. Because you know when you get your first house, you want to get out and go someplace else. But, you know, after you consider everything, you know, then you realize. The kids was grown. You know, so we had nobody to take care of but ourselves.

Q: If you could have one wish for Newark, what would that be? What kind of changes would you like to see Newark make now for the benefit of African-Americans? Or what would you like to see us do in order to make life better for us in Newark?

Pearce: I tell you the only thing that I would like to see, wish perhaps. And I assume that it would never happen now. Is that the type of relationship that we had with one another would return.



That is the only thing. Because we all live our separate lives, but just because you're black and I'm Spanish and you're Italian and you're Jewish. You understand? We're all human beings. And that's what I would like to see. You know what I mean. A return. Just because you're black, they don't want to live next to you. You understand? And if you're Jewish, this group don't want to live next. So that's what I would like to. This is America. And we have all nationalities in America, and I would hope and pray one day that we all could live together in peace and harmony without any color barriers.

Q: Well, Mrs. Pearce, again, like I say, that's the end of our interview. And I am so grateful that you allowed me to come and that you have shared your memories and your experiences with me for the benefit of our cultural center in Newark. And again, I just want to say thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW